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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION & THE CATECHISM.

By M. Bramston.

On reading the interesting papers on the "Religious Education of Children," in the *Parents' Review*, I could not help feeling what curiously opposite dangers, according to different authorities, beset the subject. In England, at least at the present day, there seems to be uncommonly little need to warn parents not to teach their children theology. Mr. Bird's warnings might have been extremely useful some fifty years back; and even to-day it would be just as well to suggest the expurgation of *Peep of Day* and *Line upon Line* before they are given into the hands of children. But as a rule, unless it comes from nursemaids who feel that the threat of hell-fire is likely to assist them in enforcing obedience in the matter of putting away bricks and not soiling pinafores, the children of the upper classes are singularly free from anything which in a good or bad sense could be termed theology.

I gather that Mr. Bird does not belong to the Church of England, or he would not suggest that parents of the Church of England were likely to wish to inflict that venerable historical document, the Thirty-nine Articles, upon their children. As he classes it with "the Catechism," I imagine that he means not the Church of England Catechism but the "Shorter Catechism," for there is certainly little in common between the Thirty-nine Articles and the little section in the Prayer Book, beginning "What is your name? N or M." When I was eight years old, and a little cousin from the Highlands came to stay with me, he groaned over his catechism, while I thought mine absurdly easy; but when I saw the length of the Shorter Catechism I crowed over him unmercifully, and only wondered (and wonder still) what the Longer Catechism could possibly be like. I may be partial, but I still prefer "N or M."

What I want to do in this paper is to speak up for the use of catechisms — not controversial catechisms, but simple catechisms for instruction like that in our English Prayer Book; and from this I should withdraw the appendix on the

Sacraments, not because it is not a very useful statement of the teaching of the English Church on the subject, but because the language is so extremely crabbed that children cannot take in the meaning. Unless you absolutely recast the wording, no child understands anything by "As a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." You would certainly have to explain *means*, *the same*, *pledge*, *assure*, and *thereof* in this sentence, and it would be simpler to give the teaching in other words. But this does not apply to the body of the Catechism, and it is this of which I wish to speak.

The Church of England charges the sponsors at baptism to bring the child for confirmation as soon as he has learnt "the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments in the vulgar tongue"; and the Catechism is instruction on these three subjects. Its framers thought that full churchmanship, or, as someone called it the other day, the "ordination of the laity," should not be conferred until a child had some notion of the facts of the Christian faith, the duties it involved, and the help obtainable by prayer. The Catechism begins with the assertion that "N or M"—no abstract statements about every child born into the world, but little Jack or Molly who says the answers—is God's child already, and has not to work his way up to that position by any effort, either of faith or works.

I do not wish to say that the corresponding negative to this assertion would be the same now as it was when the Catechism was written. What we now realise to be the condition of unbaptised babes is an innocent and unconscious dependence upon their Heavenly Father, and whereas they were before His children *de facto*, baptism makes them His children *de jure;* but three centuries ago a harsher phraseology was in vogue. However, the negative statement is not inserted into the Catechism, and I do not see that we need investigate too closely what the framers would have formulated with regard to unbaptised infants. The Appendix says that they are "by nature born in sin and the children of wrath," but after all, the fact behind this strong language, and the doctrine of original sin in general, is that the line of least resistance in human nature means submission to the animal instincts, and that we all need both human and divine help to rise beyond the animal.

We then take the Apostles' Creed, the separate clauses of which are here called the Articles of the Christian Faith, and unfortunately are sometimes confounded with the redoubtable Thirty-nine by those who ought to know better. It is in teaching this that we first (in our Catechism studies) bring the child in contact with the story of our Lord. I am quite sure that it is right to teach the child the facts of the Apostles' Creed regarding His history and the way in which we regard Him. I am not quite sure that it is desirable to teach *all* children very fully about Him. There is, I am afraid, a risk that some of them will be bored. To such the persistent dwelling upon the Gospel story is what the author of the Epistle calls meat and not milk. We may be quite sure that they will be none the worse for coming to fuller knowledge later, with faculties of love and admiration awake and active. In such a case, it seems to me that our great task will be to exercise the faculties of love and admiration on other subjects—if we can make them thrill over Horatius or Mowgli it will make a beginning—and then by-and-by they will realise that in Him all heroism culminates. Only do not let us be so anxious to be reverent that we convey to the children the impression that He was not human, and that His temptations and conflicts were merely a drama enacted for our edification, with no reality behind.

Let us also, with regard to this, respect our children's reserve. Mr. Bird speaks of asking a child if he believes in Jesus. My experience of children is that such a question would seem silly to a simple and open child, while to a reserved one—more especially one who was beginning to realise a relation between himself and his Master—it would be scarifyingly painful.

> "Rend not the silken veil too soon,
> But leave her in her own soft noon
> To flourish and abide."

But granted that the child has acquired the love for Jesus Christ which we all hold to be the central point of the Christian religion, what next? This love, let us here say, will sometimes be expressed in a somewhat questionable form. "I love Jesus, but I hate God," a girl said to me once; and less outspoken children often feel the same. I attribute it to the well-meant attempt of mothers and nurses to produce conscientiousness

by saying, "God sees you whatever you do, He is always looking when no one else is there," which conveys the notion of the Deity as an unfair spy, or an inexorable detective, prepared to punish with the greatest severity what you did when you thought you were alone. Even the most well-meaning of us too often cause our little ones to stumble; the millstone is not round our neck, but it gets somehow into our brains.

However, supposing that our little one really grasps the fact that in Jesus Christ he has the most beautiful, attractive, heroic of figures, and that this is his Master and Brother, what is to come next? In some form or other the little disciple will ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and the answer, "Be good," has to be split up into various factors, which together form a code of ethics. Now, the Ten Commandments give the ethical code of the Jewish nation. In themselves they are crude and somewhat rough, and the second and fourth wholly inapplicable to modern English life; but our Lord took these commandments and used them not as laws, but as principles, and showed how they were to have their scope of action enlarged. Three of them are thus enlarged in St. Matt. v., and the deduction is that the rest are to be enlarged in like manner. Now, this enlargement is admirably done, with a view to the comprehension of children, in the "Duty to God," and "Duty to the Neighbour." The latter, more especially, forms a most admirable code of ethics for children, and is equally suitable to those whose religious sentiment has been developed and those in whom it is rudimentary.

It has been the custom during the past half-century to scoff at the "Duty to the Neighbour." The reaction against feudalism caused those who took the anti-feudal side to assert that "to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters" meant to make a bob or a scrape to the squire or squiress; and "that state of life to which it shall please God to call me" (by persistent misquotation as "*has* pleased God to call me") came to be looked upon as the assertion that the Church disapproved of any man of low degree rising out of his original condition. These jeers were partly caused by ignorance, partly by prejudice. But personal experience is worth many secondhand jeers, and as an elderly woman I

feel my deepest obligation to those who, in my childhood, taught and ground into me the meaning of "Duty to my Neighbour," and so provided me with an ethical standard by which, from eight to eighteen, I could test my own actions of right or wrong.

It embraced the whole range of a child's life. If I wanted to read a story instead of playing trap-bat with my brother, conscience whispered "do to all men as I would they should do to me"; if I banged the door in a temper and was called back to shut it, "submit myself to all my governors, &c."; if I made a tart remark, "hurt nobody by word"; if one was tempted to cheat in a game, "true and just in all my dealings"; if one was lazy at lessons, "do my duty in that state of life." And as to the obnoxious "ordering myself lowly and reverently to all my betters," I cannot remember any motto which was of greater service; for my betters were defined to be "those who were older, wiser, or in higher position than myself," and this comprehended my governess, my elder sister, my nurse—but I struck at including the nurserymaid, who was thirteen when I was ten.

Is it impossible that in spite of the Cowper-Temple clause some modified form of the "Duty to the Neighbour"—possibly in less archaic English—might be permitted in our primary schools? At present this invaluable code of ethics must be confined to voluntary schools; I am afraid even there it is not always made as much of as it should be. If I were in authority I would have a copy in large print hung up on every school wall. I think it would do more to improve the ethical standard of our scholars, if frequently explained and referred to, than anything else conceivable.

What I should suggest would be a paraphrase of this sort, which would not run counter to the Cowper-Temple regulations:—

DUTY TO OTHERS.

1. To love other people as myself, and to do to others as I should wish them to do to me.
2. To love, respect, and help my father and mother.
3. To obey the laws of the country, and to honour the King and those who are in authority.
4. To obey those who are set over me, whether as teachers or employers.

5. To speak kindly and pleasantly to all, and respectfully to those older and wiser than myself.
6. To be gentle to little children and old and sick people.
7. To be kind to animals.
8. To be fair at lessons and play, honest with money, and to keep my promises.
9. Not to take anything, however small, that does not belong to me.
10. To keep up no grudge against anyone.
11. Not to be greedy in eating or drinking.
12. Not to let high spirits prevent me from behaving properly.
13. To be modest in my conduct and words.
14. To tell the truth.
15. To keep from talking about the faults of others, and to say nothing unkind about them behind their backs, but to speak honestly about them if called on by those who have a right to know.
16. To do my best to learn, in school or out of it, so that I may grow up into a good and useful man or woman, able to support myself and to help others.

The third division of the Catechism is on the subject of the Lord's Prayer, and treats the various clauses in the same way as the "Duties" teach the Commandments, namely, as texts for separate prayers which enlarge its verbal meaning. This again is a valuable *study* for prayer, the great difficulty of which is breaking up the condensed central idea, which quickly becomes familiar and monotonous. When I was a child of six or so, unwisely left with my brother to say our prayers alone, we spent our time in pillow-fights, condensing our prayers into "O God, give us everything that is good for us, Amen." The opposite process is the one which makes prayer real, and which many people find exceedingly difficult even when no longer children. The "I desire" answer of the Catechism is an excellent lesson in breaking up condensed prayer into what we may call its factors—though these may, with profit, be subdivided again.

I hope what I have said may call the attention of some people who have been led to despise the Church Catechism, to its educational value, and I feel sure that the more they study it and use it the more they will be inclined to agree with the views here expressed.